



“PROMISING PRACTICE” FOR SUMMER 2009:

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Afterschool Program

Administering Organization

East African Community Services (EACS); Seattle, Washington

Program Objectives and Unique Needs Addressed

Objective: To offer culturally-specific support to East African students through homework completion, reinforcement of basic skills, and self-confidence building.

Unique needs addressed: Student participants are primarily Somali refugee children, though some of their families were resettled in the U.S. before they can remember. EACS recognizes that many of the children's parents are illiterate, and few have the English skills to assist their children at home with homework. The Afterschool Program provides a safe, consistent space for the students to get basic homework assistance while honoring and preserving their diverse cultural heritage.

Program Description

The Afterschool Program runs for two hours, Monday through Thursday. A volunteer-driven program with one volunteer tutor for every four-to-five students, the program's first purpose is homework assistance. The program operates in a carefully nurtured environment that is both structured and flexible, recognizing the students' need for consistency but also the benefit of a safe, laid-back environment in which to learn and play. Students sit at tables by grade level with a volunteer tutor. When all the students at the table have completed their homework, the tutor facilitates enrichment activities from a supply of math games and language-building activities, or takes students outside for rousing physical activity.

In addition to the Afterschool Program, EACS offers a number of complementary programs to benefit youth and their families, including the East African Youth Sports Program (boys' soccer during the school year, with soccer and basketball for boys and girls starting in the summer), and the Peer Leadership Development Program, through which East African high school students are recruited to tutor younger children in the Afterschool Program in exchange for college preparatory support, service-learning opportunities, and a safe community for motivated youth from the East African community to build their leadership skills and impact their neighborhood.

Resource Materials Used in Program

When supplementary materials are needed to reinforce basic learning concepts (especially for the youngest students), program staff use the educational resource Web site www.EdHelper.com. Our enrichment activity games to build literacy are from “More Than Just Talk: English Language Learning in Afterschool” and “Global Graffiti Wall” (both published by the Center for Afterschool Education Foundations, Inc). The activity games to build math skills are from several sources, including a binder created by Seattle Public Schools’ Family Support & Community Partnerships Program; card games that correlate with Seattle Public Schools’ Everyday Math Curriculum; and multiplication facts reinforcement with “Math-It” (published by Weimar Institute). Students can also access hundreds of donated books at various reading levels, and mainstream educational games like “BrainQuest” and “20 Questions: For Kids.”

Groups Served by Program

Most of the students seeking tutoring in the Afterschool Program are between kindergarten and 8th grade, while high school students can volunteer through the Peer Leadership Development Program to serve as tutors in the Afterschool Program. The majority of students are Somali refugees, as well as Oromo, Tigrinya, and Yemeni students. Most students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program (indicating low-income). Some of the students are completely proficient in English, but most range from non-English speakers to conversationally-competent but weak in academic English.

Program Funding

The Afterschool Program is entirely funded by a Refugee School Impact Grant from the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The Peer Leadership Development Program is funded through an agreement with Seattle Housing Authority.

Program Staffing and Required Staff Training

The Youth Programs Coordinator works full-time on youth programming, with part-time support from the Outreach Coordinator (an AmeriCorps VISTA position). An additional four tutors are part-time paid staff to ensure consistency and quality in the tutoring—and all of these staff (including the Youth Programs Coordinator) are from the community, providing culturally-appropriate outreach and services. The remainder of support is entirely volunteer-based, with 16 unpaid tutors at present. Most tutors come through university “Service Learning” programs (fulfilling community service volunteer requirements), or students and young professionals find EACS through volunteer Web sites such as www.Idealist.org and www.VolunteerMatch.org. All volunteers go through an orientation process to learn about the community and culture, the program structure, and tips for working with English Language Learners. Ongoing training opportunities are presented throughout the year on specific topics, such as strategies for using educational games and empowering students.

Program Evaluation

EACS has not yet implemented a full program evaluation since the current funding and programming is new this year. However, all students receive a basic math pre- and post-assessment. Tutor input is also informally collected to assess the success of the program from the tutor perspective. In addition, an English Language Learner (ELL) Coach from “School’s Out Washington” has been involved with the Afterschool Program and has provided feedback at a structural level.

Program Outcomes

- That every student will know *who they are* (versus how the world defines them).
- That every student will be functionally comfortable with multiplication facts.
- That every student—whatever their grade, level, or English ability—will improve their understanding of and ability to manipulate sentence structure.

Other Key Elements

Though the program budget is relatively small—and thus the agency struggles with running big events that otherwise would be great to offer students—EACS has tapped into the power of joint programming in order to realize program goals. For example, in February EACS hosted a Family Math Night in conjunction with the Atlantic Street Family Center and Seattle Public Schools. More than 25 staff and volunteers facilitated nine educational games for over 75 attendees. Both students and parents went from station to station playing games about addition, fractions and flashcards, increasing the math confidence and competence of both children and parents.

In another example of organizational partnership, after learning that neighborhood Vietnamese youth were intimidated by Somali youth, EACS met with staff at a neighboring agency—the Vietnamese Friendship Association (VFA)—to plan a joint field trip to the Seattle Aquarium (EACS provided donated passes and VFA provided bus tokens and packed lunches). The students were mixed together and given a “Scavenger Hunt” to work on in groups. Both agencies’ staff saw this as an opportunity to validate the uniqueness of each culture while breaking down harmful stereotypes through relationships.

EACS recently introduced parent workshops for the parents of Afterschool Program participants, by partnering with other local organizations. From the beginning, mothers of students in the Afterschool program have been asking EACS to offer services and education for them during the Afterschool Program, while their children were actively and safely engaged in learning. Refugee parents fall quickly behind in literacy and language levels when their children enter school, and many of the mothers of students in the Afterschool Program are eager for the same information that the children gain from their tutors. Through extensive outreach and coordination EACS has found a series of volunteer speakers (with Seattle Public Schools, City of Seattle, and the YWCA/YMCA) to come during the Afterschool Program hours to present information to parents on everything from Internet safety and bullying to basic literacy and reading. In this way, EACS is strengthening family relationships by empowering parents with knowledge about issues affecting their children or giving them increased access to current issues.

Program Additional Comments

EACS is a multi-service agency with varied [funding sources](#). In complement to the agency’s youth programming, EACS seeks to strengthen family relationships by offering other adult education opportunities (like ESL Talk-Times, Citizenship Classes, and Basic Computer Literacy) at several different times throughout the week to accommodate different schedules. Whenever EACS holds special events (including the Family Math Night), families are asked to bring food to share with each other so that relationship building and cultural-sharing can take place over a plate of homemade food. All parents are welcome to stay during the Afterschool Program to observe or take part in the program, and several parents take advantage of this opportunity regularly.

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Program Dates

This program began in October 2008 and is still operating as of June 2009.